

*-ANOTHER'S FOOL-*

# **ANOTHER'S FOOL**

**A novel**

**Steven Key Meyers**

–STEVEN KEY MEYERS–

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-ANOTHER'S FOOL -

*This one's for you, Al*

*Troilus:* You cannot shun yourself.

*Cressida:* Let me go and try.  
I have a kind of self resides with you,  
But an unkind self that itself will leave  
to be another's fool.

–Shakespeare,  
*Troilus and Cressida*

1.

AS WE ROLLED THROUGH the tunnel, a dark man of mystery was blowing frost at me through glass iced with cigarette smoke. Harlem's daylight made him a ghost, and his hollow cheeks and uneasy expression haunted me over Westchester's snowy ground. *The hell he want?*

I would have preferred staying in the city that January morning. Mondays tend to be a victory lap at Nikolodimsky Concert Management, low-key and satisfying after the hectic week and weekend. Telephones ring with clients calling in grosses and audience counts, while Western Union messengers bring more, and we chart, kibitz, gossip, analyze reviews, congratulate or console one another, generally catch up with how we're doing on our mission of bringing classical music to the masses.

David had called me at our apartment in Greenwich Village the night before, and the news as usual was good: an SRO house in Des Moines Saturday night, his Dvořák and

Rachmaninoff applauded to the rafters, at Sunday’s recital three encores demanded. No surprise: David Spigall is a genius and a star.

Acute, too—asked if everything was OK, and it was all I could do to persuade him that yeah, sure, everything’s fine, no trouble in Paradise. In fact, I’m not sure he bought it.

Though I could usually fool David—only when it was best for him, of course—the last thing on Earth I’m capable of is fooling *myself*. So let me admit right off that I’m rather a shit, or was so in the flower of my youth, as young people often are, having their way to make in a world not very welcoming to them.

But never as bad as some might claim. Criticism from the muddled (if numerous) sort jealous of us who know what we want? Just too easy. How can clear motives in and of themselves be blameworthy?

When the train slowed and the conductor came through calling “Katonah! *Katonah!*” I pulled myself to my feet and, rudely reminded of my shoulder, stepped off into the cold air and looked around for a taxicab. I’d not before been to this northern Westchester village, summer and weekend redoubt of horse-loving financiers. Opposite the station stood a block of old-fashioned storefronts.

“Mr. Harnes!” a voice called peremptorily, the misplaced stress making my name an item of riding tack.

I focused on a big, wide-faced chauffeur my age in pearl-buttoned moleskin livery that hinted at brutality; in another context I might have looked twice. He was holding open the rear door to a cream-and-black Cadillac limousine, one of those early 1950s behemoths gnashing twin chrome incisors in its grille, projections shaped like artillery shells. The custom padded roof, half a foot higher than usual, meant I didn’t have

to stoop to get in. As I was to find in a few minutes, Mrs. Berlin was herself tall and regal.

My boss had called me in as soon as I got to the office that morning, for all that I was, on purpose, early. He was earlier still. But then, that Russian-born force of nature who pulls the strings of American high culture, dedicating his whole intense being to music and ballet, does nothing but work. Since emerging from obscurity after the Bolshevik Revolution, Nickel-and-dime (his employees' mostly fond nickname, Aleksandre Michaelovitch Nikolodimsky being a mouthful) has become a principality unto himself, dealing with governments as their equal to pull off such coups as bringing the Bolshoi Ballet to America. Many days East-West relations seem centered in his office as he works to draw artists West from behind the Iron Curtain and to send our best East. His taste is informed, catholic and more welcoming to the new than the American public's, which he privately characterizes as having the hardened arteries of the Old Regime. And does he make a good thing of it? Oh, yes: Lives like a count on Park Avenue and in Old Woodbury.

"Mrs. Dora Berlin," he pronounced, lounging against his chairback as cars honked ten stories below on 57th Street. "Ring any bells?"

I hesitated. "Didn't her husband die?"

"Year before last," he confirmed. Max Berlin, eminent Wall Streeter, art collector and amateur pianist; an Arnold Genthe portrait had garnished his *Times* obituary, index finger propping up a marble cheek burnished to wait out eternity. He had occasionally booked artists from our roster to perform at private musicales at his town or country places. "Well, Mrs. Berlin has an idea. Told her you'd go out to Katonah and talk to her. She'll give you lunch. There's a train in" – he shot a look at the Richard Street longcase clock – "35 minutes."

“Yes, sir,” I said.

“Call,” he added. “And don’t mention your – weekend. Grandsons, young boys.”

Hence rattling out of town in the smoking car and now riding in a limousine whose interior was tufted like a casket’s. What was the wily old man up to? Firing me?

I’d counted on his not finding out about my disastrous Saturday night, but clearly he knew all about it. How? But information being his lifeblood, why wouldn’t he have informants in the NYPD just as at the State Department and Soviet Embassy and every known security apparatus? Through Cadillac windows I surveyed the world quite possibly a ruined man.

Of course I attended my quartet’s New York debut Saturday at the Carnegie Lyceum. Penguins swaying in unison, they played their Haydn and Schumann beautifully. I’d called over to the *Herald Tribune* and *Times* and confirmed that critics, if of the third string, would be in attendance, which meant short notices appearing on Tuesday. So much to the good, since with the Sheboygan’s performance there was no question any reviews would be positive, despite the tendency of critics (third-string ones especially) to pull at some extraneous loose thread and carp on it in a desperate *look at me*.

Afterwards I took them next door to the Russian Tea Room for a celebratory toast (not supper), before returning downtown by subway. Columns flashing past like sprockets on a film reel brought the evening’s drama to a close.

On my way home to the Bleecker Street apartment I shared with David, I stepped into a bar on Sheridan Square. The Minstrel Man’s a quiet place, more given to conversation than your average Village watering hole. It was still early when I took my seat at the end of the bar – midnight’s the witching hour. Smoking, sipping Scotch, I ignored my surroundings, a



man of mystery in black tie, handsome (if you say so), all cheekbones and hooded eyes. Men in suits pressing inside, the bar gradually filled up with a clientele, if not exactly genteel, certainly a cut above.

I was halfway through a second drink and, spiderlike, sensing my prey about to strike—some predator brave enough to try to penetrate my mystery, shortly to discover himself ensnared in my web—when loud and fast there came, “*Against the wall, you fucking cocksuckers!*” and “*Move it, ladies!*” and “*Raid!*”

My first raid, first arrest. The persuasive effect I have on people—fed by my conviction that everything in life is negotiable, *everything*—held no sway at “*Raid!*” When cops charged in flailing batons, nothing I could say differentiated me from anyone else. And set aside any repercussions with Nickel-and-dime, my relationship with David was not supposed to extend to meeting men in bars.

They corralled us into black marias, a gratuitous blow crushing my shoulder; fortunately I no longer play but for my own amusement. Downtown at The Tombs they jammed us into one big, stinking cell awash with vomit and crowded with a Saturday night assortment of drunks and muggers who found sport in taunting us. The next morning, no one having slept a wink, we were released—photographed, fingerprinted and given desk appearance tickets for disorderly conduct; left to find our way home on the Sabbath in soiled Saturday night garb. Such were the tactics of 1953: wholesale scoopings-up of homosexuals who forever after had police records, with whatever that might mean in job or relationship troubles. We were favorite scapegoats for a society filled with fear.

Why the fear? Having helped fight and win a world war against tyranny, the U.S. was prospering as never before. So why hysteria about Communism, when it could make no

inroads in a society getting rich on capitalism? Why the obsession with men who like men, police raids wherever we gathered? Don’t ask me!

I went into work that morning hoping I bore no mark or taint, aside from my invisibly aching shoulder, but Nickel-and-dime’s cultivated basso had called me into his office and put me on my train.

The limousine swam down narrow curving roads. Out here the snow looked deep. The houses we passed ranged from large to larger to invisible, which meant enormous. The trees were mostly softwoods; formerly dairy country? We turned into a lane, passed two antique barns, crossed an arched stone bridge—and entered a magical realm. For all that it was January, I could tell we were in a manicured garden precinct, its outskirts a village of stucco cottages, farther on a sprawling, low-slung mansion sprouting a dozen fanciful chimneys from red-tile roofs. This was the back way onto Ca’Dora, Mrs. Berlin’s place.

Going through a pergola entwined with leafless wisteria, we pulled up at a marble balustrade near the long vine-covered front, two-storied and stucco. Beyond were snowy lawns and hedges.

“Thank you,” I said when the chauffeur came round and opened my door. Ignoring his possibly meaning smile, I walked towards the cast-stone archway that broke the façade, was just reaching to the bell-pull when a silver-haired butler stepped out and unlatched the wrought-iron gate.

“Welcome, Mr. Harnes,” he said, his emphasis correct. He clanged shut the gate behind me and with a bow opened a door. I had just time to cast a glance over the arcades of a large flagged courtyard before entering a most pleasant sitting room. “Hat and coat, sir?”

He carried them away, leaving me to inspect over the fire a glittering view in oils of, as I later learned, the ballroom of London's bombed-out Halliwith House, one of Mrs. Berlin's girlhood homes. Precious objects in bronze, jade, cloisonné enamel, Italian majolica and Ch'ien-lung porcelain surrounded me, and layers of fabric enwrapped me: needlepoint upholstery, silk brocade on the walls, on the floor a fine Bokhara.

There was a step, and into the room wearing tailored tweeds and carrying a riding crop came a handsome, imposing woman who appeared younger than the mid-fifties I knew she was.

"Mr. Harnes? Dora Berlin. So good of you to come all this way."

2.

LATE THAT AFTERNOON Mrs. Berlin dropped me at Carnegie Hall, opposite Nickel-and-dime’s offices.

Her limousine growled off, a whale among minnows. The overcast was so pronounced that, at not 4:00 o’clock, lights were coming on. But there’s glamour to New York’s early winter dusk, the city’s nerves and energies throbbing as people stride onto the pavements eager to get on with it. Pulling my fedora low so as not to meet some man’s gaze or brush his knuckles and reflexively end up in his bed—there was no time!—I crossed the street and, nodding at the doorman, entered our building.

When I’d telephoned from the country, Sophie, his secretary, had me hold the line while Nickel-and-dime railed away in Russian from his supposedly sound-proofed office, whether at his wife about dinner or at the Soviet Ambassador—quite possibly in person—about getting an exit permit for an artist he wished to sponsor.

Finally the savagery ceased and Sophie connected us.

“*Well?*” It came out *Vell?* “How do you find our lady friend?”

“Very nice. She’s fed me well and showed me around.”

“And?”

“Ambitious plans, and no time to spare. But I told her I’d do it.”

“Goot!”

“Look, Mr. Nikolodimsky, I’m going to Chicago tonight to break it to David. Back Thursday – working lunch with Mrs. Berlin.”

“David? Goot!” House policy required that client-management changes be made face-to-face for, as Nickel-and-dime put it, “Music is *people*, and people you treat with *respect*.” My other clients happening to be in town, I could deal with them on my return. Another house policy – the generous expense accounts that allowed us to travel first-class, the better to bolster the prestige of the arts – would make the round-trip bearable. “Train’s at five? Come in before.”

David. We’d been together five years, and I was in love with him still. He was handsome and supremely talented; I *had* to love him, even if, loving him, I was tied down, domestic, not myself, living a persona whose reflection, however pleasing, wasn’t mine – and in addition forever having to hear *You’re not good enough!* (Not that *David* would dream of saying such a thing.) But now Mrs. Berlin proposed hiring me to start a summer music festival at Ca’Dora and I could no longer manage his career. Someone else had to take over; I had to set him free.

A music festival outdoors on a great estate! So much to do! Dates; artists; programs; publicity. Parking! My God, *chairs!* My God, what if it *rained?*

And so little time! But I was thrilled, going from fearing I’d lost my job (though apparently I had) to having a niche of my own in the music world!

The usual progress of a career at Nickel-and-dime’s was glacially slow. I personally managed two pianists – David one

of them—plus the Sheboygan Quartet, a cellist, a flautist, a fiddler, a chorus and two conductors: Booked their appearances and negotiated their fees, collected commissions, wrote program notes, arranged interviews, under their by-lines ghost-wrote articles for the music press (*On First Hearing Delius; The Best Advice Toscanini Ever Gave Me*), advised on repertoire, attended recording sessions, even posed them at keyboard or music stand and photographed them, and all for a pittance.

And this I’d been doing since being hired out of the Juilliard School of Music three years earlier with bachelor’s and master’s degrees in music criticism—hired at David’s behest—and had every prospect of continuing for another thirty or forty years. Though he’d been around forever, Nickel-and-dime was by no means elderly; counting on promotion, much less succession, was pie-in-the-sky.

So Mrs. Berlin’s patronage represented an opportunity I couldn’t pass up. Founding a festival? I could do that!

Our offices were in a grimy brown brick building dedicated to the music trade, a mixture of studios and offices. At any hour of the day one could hear expert touches on piano or violin; our office game was to guess who was working where: Firkušný, Rubinstein, Horowitz? Heifetz, Zimbalist, Menuhin? A baritone was vocalizing as I waited for the elevator. Robert Merrill?

Nickel-and-dime’s corner office was a two-story former studio paneled in walnut. Behind his desk, clocks displayed the time across North America and in London, Paris and Moscow, and antique New England weathervanes from his collection studded the wall opposite. The grandfather clock, lacquered in *chinoiserie*, shaded the passing seconds into majestic *tocks* and *ticks*.

As I went in, my boss was sitting silent and still as the Buddha across from two visitors in gray suits, white shirts, dark ties. Their heads snapped towards me in tandem and they stood up menacingly. Crew-cuts made their faces those of identical boys. One had the physique of my father, the All-American fullback. The other was slender, even willowy. The first was somewhat older than myself, the second younger.

“Ah, here’s Mr. Harnes,” said Nickel-and-dime, remaining seated, “who, as of Thursday morning, will no longer be in my employ. Bruce, these gentlemen are from the Federal Bureau of Investigation.”

An odd introduction. The elder—Special Agent Nolan—grabbed my fingers, his jaw telegraphing his intention of crushing them, but pianists have strong hands; I was gratified to make him wince. The blond offered me his hand gravely, and I pressed it with equal gravity. Palm and fingers were warm, his eyes enormous; I rather fell in. His name was Phil Goddard. It surprised me to find a fairy among the G-men.

“I’ve told them you’re going to assist Mrs. Berlin in staging a music festival. Am I correct?”

“Yes, and about that, Mr. Nikolodimsky—forgive me, gentlemen, but I have a train to catch—I want David Spegall as Music Director.”

“*David Spegall!* Get out of here!”

David’s reputation was as a pianist, but he was also a gifted conductor. Directing such a festival might place him in the running to lead the New York Philharmonic, should Mitropoulos ever pass the baton. In any case it was crucial that my Festival nab somebody whose prestige could attract musicians to play as well as the public’s attention. And only fair, even as I claimed my freedom, that David have a consolation prize.

“No, sir: I need him. Can offer a very good fee.”

“Listen to yourself!” he exclaimed in a way that closed the topic for the time being. “Special Agent Nolan wishes to speak with you.”

Standing at angles to each other, Nolan and Goddard boxed me in, the younger’s pelvis thrust out, body arched like a bow pulled to highest tension.

“What can I do for you?” I asked affably.

“Not for *us*,” began Nolan.

“For your *country*,” Goddard finished.

“And just what does that mean?”

Disgust clenching his features, Nolan declared, “Two nights ago you were arrested at a resort for perverts in Greenwich Village.” Nickel-and-dime turned to look out the window.

“Apparently you know all about it.”

“The disposition of the case?”

“Desk ticket for disorderly conduct,” I said shortly. “I’ll pay a fine at my arraignment.”

The younger man relaxed, the bow going slack as the arrow hit its mark, and both sat down again, as did I.

“Mr. Harnes, we’re not here about *that*,” said Goddard, leaning forward, “but in connection with your relations with Mrs. Dora Berlin.”

This surprised me. “Why would Mrs. Berlin interest your Bureau?”

Nolan said, “Given her ties to Josef Stalin –”

“*What!*” I was astonished.

“Oh, yes,” he said. “Twenty years ago she had a love affair with a *Russian*, until Uncle Joe personally intervened.”

“Plus, she was married to a *Jew* –” put in Goddard.

“Now, listen here –”

“– and her daughter to a *Hungarian*.”

“Look here, Mrs. Berlin’s as distinguished a lady as we have,” I said, “not excepting Eleanor Roosevelt.” Better not to



have mentioned Eleanor Roosevelt. “One grandfather was Lincoln’s Minister to Paris, the other a Union Army general. For goodness’ sake, her stepfather is Churchill’s *cousin!*”

Better not to have mentioned Churchill.

“Churchill,” sneered Goddard.

“Mrs. Berlin travels in circles that include Russkis, Jews, Commies, Brits and queers,” Nolan summed up. “Given the present climate, we need your help.”

The present climate of hysteria, he meant, Americans convinced that liberals—abetted by queers (etc.)—were bent on handing the country over to Stalin. Truman, President until the week before, boasted of purging hundreds of homosexuals from the State Department.

“Gentlemen—” I began deprecatingly.

Goddard interrupted. “With your police record, Mr. Harnes, you’d be well advised to cooperate.”

“Ah.” There we were: Already I was being blackmailed—and by a little faggot. Kafkaesque! Orwellian!

“Call it cultural counter-espionage,” his colleague suggested. “It’s a matter of national security that we monitor Mrs. Berlin.”

“Bruce, you must agree,” Nickel-and-dime said flatly, revolving towards his weathervanes.

“Inform on my new boss?” My old one shrugged.

“Special Agent Goddard will be your contact,” Nolan said as the other handed me a card bearing a telephone number. “You are FBI Confidential Informant DB-2. Call every week, and he’ll set a meeting. If you don’t call, he’ll find *you*.”

I studied the card. “And Confidential Informant DB-1? Who might that be?”

They looked askance at each other, but said nothing.

I peered at Nickel-and-dime, trying to make him out. But I had no choice. There was that train, after all.

So did they give me anything in the way of tradecraft to go with my codename? Any training, any hints that might have helped prevent the catastrophe to come?

No, nothing at all.

On the way out I stopped at my desk – already cleared – to grab the suitcase I kept under it, and used the phone to call the Palmer House, where David was staying; he was to play the next evening with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. He was at rehearsal, but I dictated the message of my arrival in the morning, and ran to Grand Central.

3.

I BOARDED THE *20th Century Limited* with a minute to spare.

The gleaming, streamlined machine was shuddering in the terminal's depths, alive with anticipatory vibrations, its glamour, as I trotted up to my car, a little spoiled by someone's flushing a toilet in defiance of the ban on doing so when stopped at a station. Waste spilled onto the tracks.

I handed my bag to a porter – he took it with the delight of a child given a Christmas present – and as he showed me to my roomette we began slipping through the tunnel, a man of mystery already regarding me as I sat down. Soon the train emerged into the waning light of the Hudson's bank, metallic river waters vanishing into shadow. Absolute darkness overtook us before West Point. The man of mystery reaching out in mute appeal, I lowered the shade.

My day had passed with the weight of one of rare destiny.

"Please, Mrs. Berlin, call me Bruce."

"Bruce, do you ride?" she asked warmly.

"Western, yes."

"Next time, then." Indicating a Louis XV chair of tortoiseshell lacquer, she excused herself, soon reappearing in a silk print dress.

She poked the fire before alighting in the mate to my chair.

“Where to begin? Well, why don’t I show you?”

Springing to her feet, she led me down a terrazzo corridor past oaken linenfold doors, around a corner and along a passage with snowy lawns to one side, to the other a covered summer porch overlooking the courtyard, and through a magnificent dining room of gilded *boiserie*. I was lost by the time she pushed open gates of 16th-century Spanish wrought iron and brought me into the largest room I have ever seen in a private house. Ten rose windows—their stained glass taken, I later learned, from medieval cathedrals—pierced the thick upper walls.

“Wait,” she said.

At the wall she punched buttons, and flame-shaped bulbs sprang to life on four chandeliers twenty feet from the floor. The room thus revealed reminded me of the *Salone dei Cinquecento* in the Palazzo Vecchio, lofty and crowded. There were Louis XIII armchairs, marquetry tables, wooden Gothic statues, Renaissance busts in ceramic and marble, painted *cassoni*, carved *credenze*, a ceiling of walnut rosettes from an Italian palace, a frieze painted by Paolo Veronese and, ranged round the walls, Old Master paintings. A musicians gallery presided on high at one end; at the other, steps ascended to a stage where a grand piano stood next to some sort of contraption.

“Magnificent,” I murmured.

“Our music room,” said Mrs. Berlin. “My husband was devoted to music. Our son died in the War—”

“Oh, I’m sorry.” That I didn’t know; I was startled.

“Your age. Would have been, I mean: Max Junior. B-24 pilot, shot down over Germany. Were you in the War?”

“Army,” I answered. Did she really wish to hear about my Special Services stint as Entertainment Specialist, playing piano

at USOs on two fronts, never having a better time in my life until, caught near Mannheim with a desperately pretty corporal, they sent me to Yale to learn Japanese? Probably not.

“Our daughter doesn’t want this house—these big places are old-fashioned—so my husband and I decided to leave it for the public benefit. All very complicated, I’m afraid. After my death it goes with an endowment to the Max and Dora Berlin Foundation for Music and the Arts. *Anyway.*”

She was leading me in a slow circuit of the room, past Cellini bronzes, Han Dynasty figurines, *Quattrocento* temperas, paintings by Cranach the Elder and Canaletto and, unexpectedly, a raw Picasso nude. Everything was priceless, as well as beautiful. The jumble was of the sort that can only be redeemed by taste—but taste abounded.

“They tell me we could seat three or four hundred. The acoustics, I assure you, are *marvelous.*” I followed her up onto the stage, like the rest of the room handsomely floored in teak. The piano was a Bösendorfer, and the contraption beside it, of inlaid maple and protruding copper rods—

“Why, surely that’s not a *Primover?*” I asked.

“Yes, it is.” She beamed. “I’ve another in the city.”

“My goodness!”

I’d never seen one: The *Primover* was the world’s original electronic musical instrument, of sonic emanations spooky and weird. And wasn’t there a story about the mad Russian who invented it, Piotyr Alexandreyevitch Primov? Kidnapped in Manhattan by Russian secret agents, repatriated and shot? Something like that?

“My husband was Primov’s great patron. And I play, didn’t you know? *‘Its foremost advocate and artiste.’ Herald Tribune.* Well, not so much anymore. Now we don’t seem able to find the right kinds of tubes. We’re going mute.”

She touched the instrument, her caress permitting me to intuit something about her relations with its inventor; the FBI wasn’t just whistling *Dixie*.

In the encouraging beams of her smile, I sat down at the piano and, remarking, “My shoulder’s a little sore,” embarked on—*yes*, Ravel. Somehow I knew that polishing the prisms of *Pavane for a Dead Princess* would ravish her!

Disconcertingly, I was but a dozen bars into the piece when, her smile fading, she spoke up: “Yes, well, I wanted to show you the Florentine Cloister?”

Through French doors she took me into the courtyard, informing me that its arcades came from a Tuscan monastery. It was overlooked by the house’s upper story, chimneys looming.

“Charming,” I noted.

“We’ve had music here, too. Better acoustics than you might expect. They say it could seat five hundred or more?”

The butler leaned into the courtyard and harrumphed, “Madam, lunch.”

“Thank you, Freddie!”

We stepped indoors and, after washing up in a powder room extracted from Fontainebleau, took seats, not at the main dining-room table, but a few steps up at a glass-topped one in a bay looking out at a marble terrace. But first Mrs. Berlin went outdoors and scattered a bowl of birdseed. Within seconds doves, cardinals and sparrows were descending in waves around her. It reminded me of medieval tapestry.

Spooning her lentil soup and slicing a veal cutlet, she told me in a delightful old-fashioned, high-class drawl why she had summoned me: She wished to start a music festival that coming summer—in the classical music world, tantamount to *overnight*—using as venues her music room and Florentine Cloister, as well as the Colonnade Lawn, which she promised to show me after lunch, and on Nickel-and-dime’s

recommendation wanted *me* to take charge. Her husband's death, coming after their son's, had torn her asunder, she said; inaugurating the festival they'd dreamed of would help her cope. She mentioned also the generous salary she proposed paying me. All this in a voice high-pitched and in accents rather English, featuring the dropped g's of Oscar Wilde's day and reflecting her upbringing in Britain after her mother divorced her copper-magnate father and married a younger son of the richest commoner in England.

When the butler cleared she said, "Freddie, both cars in one hour, please? Tell Joe we'll stop at the Lawn."

"Very good, Mrs. Berlin."

"Bruce, let's go upstairs. Where I hope you'll wish to live."

Retracing our route up the corridor, this time we pierced a velvet curtain and climbed a spiral staircase as into a boys' clubhouse. We emerged into a delightful room with a peaked, beamed ceiling, a fireplace my height and latticed windows overlooking courtyard and lawns.

"This should do for the Festival office," she said. "My son's study."

Past a spacious bath tiled in a challenging purple, we found his bedroom, a comfortable chamber with a hooded mantelpiece and furnished in Henri II pieces that, for all that they were 400 years old, resembled modern Danish design. Casements commanded the lawns, and it had a charming dressing room. I felt at home immediately.

"Wonderful," I said.

"Oh, good," said Mrs. Berlin. "I *think* you'll like your rooms in my city house, too."

After gawking my way behind her through the West Wing's palatial reception rooms, and remembering to call my boss, we tramped in hats and coats through a swinging door into the butler's pantry and downstairs to a vast garage where her

chauffeur helped us into the Cadillac, while maids and housemen crammed into a wood-sided Chrysler station wagon.

We set off down an unplowed track the car didn’t much like—the main drive. After sliding a few hundred yards Mrs. Berlin said, “Here, Joe.” The limousine skidded to rest beside towering spear-tipped gates flanked by plunging horse heads sculpted by Malvina Hoffman, and we got out.

“Just a quick look,” she said, opening a door within the gates and passing through to an icy stone staircase, which we did not venture down. It descended to a long flat lawn edged with laurels and cedars at whose far end rose columns—two dozen Roman pillars of marble and porphyry defining the edges of an elevated stage. A Doge of Venice had assembled the colonnade for his gardens at Padua, Mrs. Berlin told me, where it stood for half a millennium.

“There’s room onstage for a symphony orchestra,” she said, “and on the lawn for a thousand. Acoustically challenging, though. Really we should build a bandshell or something. But you do see what I have in mind? Something like Glyndebourne or Aldeburgh?” she asked, naming two famous English music festivals.

I did see. We returned to the car. It turned around and we motored out the plowed and sanded back way, the Chrysler falling in behind us.

Steadfastly refusing the eye of the ghost in the glass beyond her, I thought about what I should say. Though I wished to be encouraging, someone had to throw the cold water of reality on her scheme—had to screw up the courage to broach what was, after all, *sink or swim, make or break* for such a project.

“Well, Mrs. Berlin, your festival’s a wonderful idea,” I said. “And at the risk of sounding immodest, I’m the perfect choice to run it. But—with apologies for being crass—I must warn you: The thing above all needful is *money*.”



“Oh, don’t worry about *that*,” she replied.

At the second seating I found my way to the dining car and was put at a four-top where only one other sat, a rather spectacular kid. Brooding mysteriously, I penciled my choice of entrée and vegetables—rainbow trout, with green beans and new potatoes—before reluctantly letting my tablemate, a grad student headed back to school, draw me into conversation. Discovering that he enjoyed behind-the-scenes music stories, I invited him for after-dinner brandy in my roomette. There was a flask in my bag.

The porter had pulled out the bed and turned down the sheets. We sat down, I poured, and the rest was delightful: the breathless reaching over, not knowing what would ensue, the kisses, toyings, unveilings of flesh and bone, and building to the moans (suppressed).

I can’t sleep with anyone but David—perhaps because we so seldom have sex—so despite his reluctance to go I packed my trick off to his seat and turned out the light.